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AUTHOR Jalongo, Mary Renck
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ABSTRACT

Underscoring folklore's appropriateness to multicultural classroom settings are its connection with past and present cultures, its constancy and change, and its potential for oral transmission of human values. Most importantly, folktales and songs enable children to participate in the history of universal human emotions. To effectively include folklore in the curriculum, teachers should be skilled in telling/reading stories, and singing/playing songs with recorded or instrumental accompaniment. Teachers can readily obtain collections of appropriate songs and detailed discussions of storytelling strategies. They, as well as children, can also easily learn to play instruments, such as the autoharp, omnichord, and dulcimer, to accompany folk songs. But to lead children to an appreciation of folk music and literature, teachers will first need to find personal relevance in traditional story and song. Teachers can do more than read a simple story and play a recorded song; they can with confidence tell a story or sing and play a song. Early childhood educators who transmit American folk music and literature in this way make a substantive contribution to each child's cultural identity. (RH)

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Preserving American Folk Heritage
Through Story and Song

Mary Renck Jalongo, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Department of Elementary Education

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705

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What are folk music and folktales? When this question was posed to some first graders, one child succinctly replied, "They're songs and stories that lots of people know and like." Marius Barbeau (1968), a Canadian anthropologist, tells us that we are encountering folklore when lullabies, riddles, tongue-twisters, counting rhymes, sayings, proverbs, fables, folktales, arts and crafts are shared with others, particularly the young. Along similar lines, Arbuthnot (1964) defines folklore as "the accumulated wisdom and art of everyday folk" (p. 252). The famous American folklorist, Alvin Schwartz (1977) describes his initiation into the world of folklore as follows:

I first became interested in folklore when most of us do, in childhood. But at the time I had no idea that the games, sayings, songs, rhymes, taunts, and jokes I knew; the things I wrote on walls; the superstitions I relied on; the tales I heard and learned; the customs we practiced at home; or the ways we had of doing things were all folklore. I also did not realize that much of this lore gave my life structure and continuity, that these games, songs, jokes, tales, and customs were often very old, that ordinary people like me had created them, and that this had survived simply and remarkably because one person had told another (p. 474).

These insights both from children and adults capture the essence of folklore.

Characteristics of Folklore

Folklore encompasses the simple songs and stories of the common man and as such, it has several distinctive attributes. Music and literature which has the following three traits qualify as folklore.

1. Folklore has a history. Often, folklore evolves over such an extended period of time that it is difficult or impossible to trace its origins. When and where did American folk songs like The Cat Came Back (Ipcar, 1974), Go Tell Aunt Rhody (Alike, 1974) or "Nobody's Business" (Weimer, 1976) begin? Who first taught nursery school children the action song, "Eency Weency Spider" (Glazer, 1977), played the circle game, The Farmer in the Dell (Zuromskis, 1978) or sang the camp song The Ants Go Marching (Freschet, 1973)? Folklore is a paradox in that it changes, yet maintains consistency. It is old and familiar, yet it has a vitality that gives it novelty and always manages to include some surprises.

Most teachers, for instance, are well acquainted with the counting song that goes, "There were ten in the bed, and the little one said, "Roll over! Roll over!" So they all rolled over and one fell out..." But when Mitzie Collins (1982) records the traditional tune, she adds the delightful refrain:

"So they all rolled over and one fell out and bumped his head and gave a shout "Please remember to tie a knot in your pajamas!" One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine in the bed..."

The cry "Roll over!" (Peek, 1981) is also the title of a song picture book version of this familiar song. The imaginative illustrations

depict a curly-headed child whose bed is populated by ten different animals, one of whom finds another sleeping arrangement at each shout of "Roll over!" until the little one is left "Alone, at last!" Thus, even though this counting rhyme has been around for a long time, it continues to emerge with an unexpected freshness that is attributable to each artist's originality.

Another good example of folkloric tradition and variation is the American chant entitled "I Had a Cat" (Martin, 1974) in a popular reading series, Fiddle-i-fee (Stanley, 1979) in a picture book, and "The Barnyard Song" (Glazer, 1977) on a children's record. A fourth version of the same story-song is called "A Farmyard Song" (Glazer, 1980) and it includes (as do the previous three versions) all the domesticated animals plus the nonsensical or real sounds associated with them:

I had a cat and the cat pleased me,
I fed my cat by yonder tree;
Cat goes fiddle-i-fee.

I had a hen and the hen pleased me,
I fed my hen by yonder tree;
Hen goes chimmy-chuck, chimmy-chuck,
Cat goes fiddle-i-fee (pp. 115-116).

The verse continues in an accumulative fashion to include a duck that goes quack-quack, a goose that goes swishy-swashy, a pig that goes griffy-griffy, and so forth. Retellings of the same chant are slightly different

because it is the very nature of folklore to be altered by each individual's interpretation. Storytellers and singers add their personal trademark so that even though folklore is historical and traditional, it is dependent upon modification for its very survival. Multicultural variants are a second important characteristic of folk music and literature.

2. Folklore is multicultural. Because America is a multi-ethnic society, folklore from many lands has been infused into our cultural heritage (Western, 1980). An entertaining Norwegian story like the runaway pancake (Power, 1969), for instance, is quickly integrated into our national folktale repertoire, but not before it is "Americanized" by a special trademark -- like converting the main character to personified gingerbread boy. In a mountain folktale version of the same basic story, Journey Cake, Ho! (Sawyer, 1953) a corn meal cake causes comparable disruptions when it begins to travel and is pursued by hungry characters. Another example of a borrowed folktale is The Carrot Seed (Krauss, 1945). In the original Russian tale, a turnip develops to such gigantic proportions that it takes an entire family to pull it from the ground (Tolstoy, 1969). The American rendition (Krauss, 1945) has the same basic story plot, but this time it is a carrot that far surpassed anyone's expectations for growth.

Many stories in which a particularly dull-witted individual ignores the admonishments of a character with a superior intellect are told

and retold all around the globe. Folklorists refer to this category of literature as numbskull or noodle-head stories and the foolish character is routinely the cause of a major catastrophe that endangers everyone. The Sorcerer's Apprentice is one story about the town fool that has an Italian variant called Strega Non. (de Paolo, 1975).

In both tales, the fool attempts to use the magical incantations he has only partially overheard and his ignorance results in an uncontrolled deluge of water and pasta, respectively. Folktales about foolish characters can be especially entertaining because their calamitous errors make the reader/listener's own mistakes seem insignificant by comparison. One explanation for numerous versions of the same basic stories or songs is the fact that folklore is most often communicated orally, through singing or telling.

3. Folklore is uniquely well-suited to the oral tradition. Even though many traditional tunes and literature are published, recorded, and filmed, folklore lends itself to the oral tradition. The folk lullaby, "Hush Little Baby", for example, is available on record (Weimer, 1976), in film (Weston Woods, 1974) and in two picture books (Alike, 1974; Zemach, 1976) but is most often encountered as a soothing lullaby that mothers use to comfort their babies. Similarly, traditional songs like Six Little Ducks (Conover, 1976), This Old Man (Adams, 1975), There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly (Wescott, 1981) or Over in the Meadow (Keats, 1972) are all available as picture books, but their popularity will continue to be supported more through

singing than through printed versions. The same holds true of riddles, knock-knock jokes, and nonsense rhymes. Although folklore in published form is a good reference source, it is more likely to be encountered first as a story retold, a joke repeated, or a song remembered and sung.

Song picture books, for example, are a fusion of folk music and folk literature which originated in the oral tradition and have been converted into children's literature (D'Angelo & Jalongo, 1983; Lamme, 1979; Toothaker, 1974). Often the country or region most directly associated with the folklore is identified. The Friendly Beasts (de Paolo, 1981), for example, is a song picture book version of a traditional English carol. Sweet Betsy From Pike (Abisch & Kaplan, 1970) is a story-song of the American west, and Mommy Buy Me a China Doll (Zemach, 1975) is an Ozark Mountain folk song. Whatever its cultural origins, however, "folklore is the born opponent of the serial number, the stamped product, and the patented standard" (Barbeau, 1968, p. 13). Folklore's connection with cultures both past and present, its constancy and change, and its potential for oral transmission of human values all underscore folklore's rightful place in multicultural classroom settings.

The Value of Folklore

Perhaps the most convincing argument for the value of folklore is the realization that these tales are a vehicle for children to

7

participate in the history of universal human emotions. In his now classic treatise on literature, Books, Children and Men, Paul Hazard (1960), describes the folktale's impact on the child in the following way:

In these tales that so many people find rather silly can be found, so wise men tell us, an entire poetic mythology, a reflection of the first dawn of human imagination ... Let us yield to the human impulse which leads us, by way of the tales, back to those remote regions which even imagination itself has trouble in reaching. See how every child repeats, through the tales, the history of our species and takes up anew the journey of our spirit from its beginnings. Threats, pursuit, mountains that cannot be crossed, all this dream material is found again in the fabulous stories that please little children. (p. 158)

The idea that children are actually recapitulating the past through folklore may seem to some an overstatement, yet what generation of American children within memory has been unfamiliar with the story of The Three Little Pigs, the counting rhyme of One, Two Buckle My Shoe, or the jump rope chant of "Mother, Mother, I Feel Sick" (Charlip & Supree, 1966)? Educators may have difficulty perceiving folklore in terms of its ancient origins, but teachers who have smiled indulgently year after year at the same jokes, referred disputes precipitated by the same taunts and feigned puzzlement over the same riddles have a

real sense of folkloric tradition. When hundreds of new songs and books for children are published each year and folklore endures, it is a statement of the appeal that traditional literature and music have for children. Obviously, the mere fact that folklore interests or amuses children is insufficient justification for its inclusion in the curriculum. Kornei Chukovsky (1963) explains the process whereby folklore is continually revised and refined as follows:

...although each new generation of parents, grandfathers, and grandmothers sings and recites to children both the good and the inferior, only that which best serves the children's needs and tastes remains in their memories. And when he reaches old age, everyone who heard in his childhood these folk chants passes on to his grandchildren, in turn, the very best, the most vivid and vital. And everything that is out of tune and incongruous with the psychology of the young child is gradually forgotten and becomes extinct ... In this way, an exemplary children's folklore has come into existence-exemplary in its language and rhythm, as well as ideally suited to the intellectual needs of the young child (p. 94).

The Educator's Role

Folklore is the child's connection with the past, but in order for teachers to lead children to an appreciation of folk music and literature, they will first need to find personal relevance in traditional story and song. A primary source of appreciation for folklore stems from its universality and teachers should be aware that folklore has significance

in their lives:

Understand that you are not very different people who lived before you, despite the trappings of modern life. You experience the same joys, the same fears, the same anger, the same love, the same need for dignity, the same need for security. Understand that you are part of a living tradition to which you contribute and from which you draw. You are deeply rooted in the experience of the human race and part of something remarkable and continuous - the folk. (Schwartz, 1977 p. 160)

But what happens when a teacher is convinced of folklore's value and senses deficiencies in his or her own familiarity with traditional literature and music? Under these conditions, resource materials (see bibliography) can be used to extend an educator's knowledge of folklore and develop teachers' skills in communicating folk music and literature.

The two basic skills that are fundamental to sharing folk music and literature with young children are 1) telling/reading stories and 2) singing or playing songs with recorded or instrumental accompaniment. Even though teachers' experiences with story and song may vary considerably, most teachers are confident of their ability to read a simple story or use a recorded version of a song effectively. But suggest to a group of teachers that they tell a story or sing and play a song and their confidence generally begins to wane. The remainder of this paper will suggest specific ways in which educators can improve their effectiveness in transmitting folklore through the oral tradition of singing and storytelling.

Singing Folk Songs

Fortunately for the nonmusician, there are simple folk instruments that are ideal accompaniment for lullabies, nursery rhymes, action songs and song picture books. Most people are familiar with the autoharp which is a zither that is automatically chorded by bars covered with felt that obliterate the sound of those strings not included in a particular chord. By simply pressing the button which corresponds to the letter of the chord and strumming, anyone, including the nonmusician and the children, can play an autoharp. It is very important for the instrument to be properly tuned and this can be accomplished with the help of a music teacher, or by following an instruction tape (Peterson, 1979). For those who are somewhat less concerned with authentic folk instruments, an electronic version of the autoharp called an omnichord is an alternative. The omnichord offers two advantages, first it never requires tuning and second, it can be set to play several different rhythms automatically, much like an electric organ. Teachers sometimes express reluctance to play an instrument fearing that their performance will be less than concert quality, but young children respond favorably to hearing an instrument in their classrooms and tend to be very tolerant of the amateur musician's errors.

Tonja Weimer Sings Folk Songs for Children (Weimer, 1976) is an excellent source of folk music that is suitable for early childhood. An autoharp is used on the recording, and teachers can quickly learn all of the songs in the accompanying booklet, none of which has more than three different chords. Several published song collections include many traditional tunes that are appropriate, both for young children

and for the autoharp (Clemens, 1977; Glazer, 1973; Peterson, 1967).

In addition, a variety of song picture books such as One Wide River to Cross (Emberley, 1966) and The Fox Went Out on a Chilly Night (Spier, 1961) summarize the lyrics, music, and chords at the book's conclusion to facilitate singing and playing along.

Another simple stringed folk instrument is the mountain or Appalachian dulcimer (see Armstrong, 1980). Although it is a slightly more challenging to play than the autoharp, it too can be played without any formal musical training.

Simple folk melodies are ideal for the dulcimer and by making a tuned instrument and song cards with corresponding numbers available, even children in the primary grades are soon able to play traditional tunes. The autoharp, omnichord and dulcimer are particularly appropriate for music experiences with young children because they are portable, easily mastered, can be played while seated among a group of students, and offer even the nonmusician an opportunity to share folk music in a more personalized way.

Sharing Folk Literature

Because the oral tradition is such an integral part of folklore, storytelling is another important skill, both for early childhood educators and their students (Stewig, 1983). As is the case with musical ability, many educators have the requisite skills, but they have become convinced that telling folktales is the exclusive province of professional

storytellers (Groff, 1977). As Power (1969) observes, however :

... the secret of story-telling is having a story to tell, one that is worth telling, one that lives vividly in the memory ... it is probably true that the greatest story-tellers are born with the gift. But the average person gets a great deal of pleasure from the responses which children give to any sincere presentation of what they consider is a real story, and in turn, children's appreciative reactions often bring out undreamed of talent from the story-teller (pp. 12-13).

The Skills of Storytelling

Educators of young children customarily have an extensive list of worthwhile stories to share. Tales like The Three Billy Goats Gruff, Little Red Riding Hood, Chicken Little, Jack and the Beanstalk or The Little Red Hen are so familiar that they can be told, rather than read without extensive preparation. General guidelines for developing successful story telling strategies are contained in "the three L's" suggested by Sivulich (1977); like your story, learn your story, and live your story. Additional competencies which educators of young children ought to develop include:

- (1) setting a mood for storytelling
- (2) appropriate use of the voice
- (3) judicious use of gestures and facial expressions

- (4) captivating introductory statements
- (5) provision for audience participation
- (6) timely, succinct conclusions

More detailed discussions of storytelling strategies for use with young children and recommendations for supplemental activities are also available (Morrow, 1979; Ross, 1972).

Folktales and Storytelling

Folktales are particularly well-suited for telling to young children because they tend to match the interest and understanding of the audience, they have a concise, action-packed plot, and they typically include both a strong beginning and a satisfying conclusion (Smith & Park, 1977; Glazer, 1981). Elements common to many folktales such as lyrical, repetitive language and exaggerated humor also contribute to their potential effectiveness with an audience of young children. Briggs and Wagner (1979) offer a simple two group classification scheme for stories shared during early childhood. They identify three to six years as "the age of repetition" when children tend to prefer accumulative tales with a clear sequence and phrases or refrains in which they can participate. When the Three Bears return home to follow the fair-headed intruder's path of destruction, for example, it seems only natural for children to join in as the bears from largest to smallest remark on the condition of their porridge, chairs and beds. During the second stage suggested by Briggs and Wagner (1979), "the age of fancy", a clearer distinction

between fantasy and reality is possible (six to nine years) and fairy tales become popular. By incorporating storytelling into the curriculum, teachers (1) give children direct experiences with the oral tradition (2) personalize literature through their own interpretations, (3) model an appreciation of traditional folklore, and (4) motivate children to themselves become storytellers. Properly implemented, storytelling is an exciting way to experience literature, enhance oral composition skills, (Stewig, 1983) and open up an entire range of enrichment possibilities (Carlson, 1976; Coody, 1973; Mendel, 1979).

Conclusion

Early childhood educators who transmit American folk music and literature make a substantive contribution to each child's cultural identity. As Tolken (1979) observes, folklore is a rich natural resource which merits the attention of professionals from a wide array of academic fields:

The historian may see in folklore the common person's version of a sequence of grand events already charted; the anthropologist sees the oral expression of social systems, cultural meaning, and sacred relationships; the literary scholar looks for genres of oral literature; the psychologist for imprints, the art historian for primitive art, the linguist for folk speech and world view, and so on (p. 3).

Educators of young children need to be numbered among the professionals who participate in conveying our multifaceted cultural heritage. As Cullinan and Carmichael (1977) assert,

There is a great store of literature to share with the young, but the wealth could go unused if adults disregard their responsibilities. Adults must sing the songs, say the rhymes, tell the tales and read the stories to the children to make literature and all its benefits central to children's lives (p. 1).

A child's familiarity with folklore has both immediate and long range effects. These simple stories and songs, readily understood by children and easily remembered by adults are told and retold in every culture of the world. Children's experiences with traditional literature accompany them throughout life into adulthood and are revived whenever members of each successive generation need the comfort of a lullaby, the reassurance that good can conquer evil or a sense of their own connectedness with human beings of other times. Folklore encapsulates the experience of the common people, touching the lives of child, parent and grandparent in a continuous cycle which begins and ends with young children.